

AMENDMENT NUMBER ONE  
BOUNDARY COUNTY IDAHO  
WILDLAND/URBAN INTERFACE  
FIRE MITIGATION PLAN  
FEBRUARY 2004

When Inland Forest Management performed the risk assessment, and prepared the fire mitigation plan for Boundary County, Idaho, the focus was on individual points or groups of habitation that were in close proximity to native forest vegetation. There is considerable intermingling of habitations in the forest in the less developed portions of the county, and conversely, a considerable intermingling of forest vegetation within communities such as the Cities of Bonners Ferry and Moyie Springs.

Mitigation planning and mitigation work has been directed at individual home sites, regardless of location in the county, IF the proximity of forest vegetation makes the building at high risk, according to the Risk Assessment Matrix. This concept seems to have worked well in meeting funding grant requirements, and improving the survivability of individual homes.

After the Boundary County Fire Mitigation Plan was completed, new national legislation, The Healthy Forests Initiative, was passed. A review of this legislation convinced the Boundary County Commissioners that by defining "Wildland Urban Interface," coordination with federal agency fuel treatment projects would be greatly simplified. The Commissioners are very desirous of attaining maximum coordination in accomplishing fire mitigation work. They have agreed to amend the original plan to include a definition of "Wildland Urban Interface."

During the assessment of Boundary County, Inland Forest Management looked at forest fuel conditions in the county (Fuel Models), past fire history and the fire behavior tendencies of those fires. Other county characteristics that were considered included long-term historical weather readings, along with places of human habitation and infrastructure. This previous work was quite helpful in developing a suitable definition.

#### WILDLAND/URBAN INTERFACE DEFINED FOR BOUNDARY COUNTY

Fuel modification work to protect habitations was defined in the Mitigation Plan for Boundary County and is the basis for grant applications to accomplish mitigating work. In addition, an external boundary within which modification of forest fuels would reinforce this work and help assure its success in the event of a fire is defined as the perimeter of the urban interface. This perimeter is two (2) miles outside places of human habitation and/or the infrastructure to service these points of habitation. Infrastructure includes power and communication lines and towers, transportation routes for ingress, egress and evacuation, rail lines, and watersheds where citizen groups have organized for joint collection of water for domestic uses. In instances where topography immediately outside the 2-mile zone would allow "anchoring" to good fire control points, such as ridge tops or roads, the zone will be extended to the anchor point. Since determination of "best" location of the boundary of this 2-mile zone is dependent on local site situations, a mapped boundary will not be created. Individual project planners will assess where this boundary will lie, in conformance with this written definition.

This "perimeter" definition will be helpful to agencies in their efforts to contribute to fuels work that would make the protection of human habitations in the interface easier and safer.

**RATIONALE.** Humans and their habitations are at greatest risk from wildfire in periods that support extreme fire behavior.

The observed behavior of fires near urban areas of Boundary County indicates that a major component of risk exposure is created by a combination of rate-of-spread and long range spotting in these fuel models. Successful establishment of spot fires in excess of 1 mile from the flaming front of active fires has occurred during several fire events in the county. In these conditions, the spot-fires grow rapidly and generate burning embers that can establish additional spot-fires further down-wind. The IFM team feels that for adequate fuel modification work to successfully protect habitation and infrastructure, in these conditions, a buffer of two miles is needed. Fuel modification in this buffer would add tremendously to the effectiveness of current fire safe work around individual homes.

As noted in the original plan, transportation routes for successful evacuation of residents at the same time crews and equipment are being deployed during a catastrophe are limited throughout Boundary County. Fuel modification work within the 2-mile zone along any of these routes greatly reduces the potential that these routes would be cut off during an event.

During wind events, downed power lines are frequent ignition sources for fires. Fuel modification treatments in a zone along these structures would greatly reduce the risk to humans and their habitations. Boundary County is extremely dependent on surface waters for domestic purposes. This dependency includes residents of the City of Bonners Ferry, as well as smaller communities of residents who have developed water intake systems scattered throughout the rest of the county. Protection of water sources and water quality is a high priority. This priority is also high in the Healthy Forests legislation.

In fire control operations, “anchoring” the line is a fundamental practice, for both effectiveness and for safety of personnel. The concept is recognized in the Healthy Forests legislation.